

ANARCHISM

IS NOT ENOUGH



A portrait of Laura Riding, a woman with dark hair and a red headband, wearing a black dress with a patterned collar and a necklace. She is looking directly at the viewer. The background is a textured green surface.

LAURA RIDING

Edited and with an Introduction by Lisa Samuels

T H E M Y T H

WHEN the baby is born there is no place to put it: it is born, it will in time die, therefore there is no sense in enlarging the world by so many miles and minutes for its accommodation. A temporary scaffolding is set up for it, an altar to ephemerality – a permanent altar to ephemerality. This altar is the Myth. The object of the Myth is to give happiness: to help the baby pretend that what is ephemeral is permanent. It does not matter if in the course of time he discovers that all is ephemeral: so long as he can go on pretending that it is permanent he is happy.

As it is not one baby but all babies which are laid upon this altar, it becomes the religious duty of each to keep on pretending for the sake of all the others, not for himself. Gradually, when the baby grows and learns why he has been placed on the altar, he finds that he is not particularly interested in carrying on the pretence, that happiness and unhappiness are merely an irregular succession and grouping of moments in him between his birth and his death.

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

Yet he continues to support the Myth for others' sake, and others continue to support it for his. The stronger grows the inward conviction of the futility of the Myth, the stronger grows the outward unity and form of the Myth. It becomes the universal sense of duty, the ethics of abstract neighbourliness. It is the repository for whatever one does without knowing why; it makes itself the why. Once given this function through universal misunderstanding, it persists in its reality with the perseverance of a ghost and continues to demand sacrifices. It is indifferent what form or system is given to it from this period to that, so long as it be given a form and a system by which it may absorb and digest every possible activity; and the grown-up babies satisfy it by presenting their offerings as systematized parts of a systematized whole.

The Myth may collapse in a social whole; yet it continues by its own memory of itself to impose itself as an aesthetic whole. Even in this day, when the social and historical collapse of the Myth is commonly recognised, we find poets and critics with an acute sense of time devoting pious ceremonies to the aesthetic vitality of the Myth, from a haunting sense of duty which they call classicism. So this antiquated belief in truth goes on, and we continue to live. The Myth is the art of living. Plato's censorship of poets in the interests of the young sprang from

THE MYTH

a realization of the fact that poetry is in opposition to the truth of the Myth: I do not think he objected to poetry for the old, since they were nearly through with living.

Painting, sculpture, music, architecture, religion, philosophy, history and science – these are essentially of the Myth. They have technique, growth, tradition, universal significance (truth); and there is also a poetry of the Myth, made by analogy into a mythological activity. Mythological activities glorify the sense of duty, force on the individual a mathematical exaggeration of his responsibilities.

Poetry (praise be to babyhood) is essentially not of the Myth. It is all the truth it knows, that is, it knows nothing. It is the art of not living. It has no system, harmony, form, public significance or sense of duty. It is what happens when the baby crawls off the altar and is 'Resolv'd to be a very contrary fellow' – resolved not to pretend, learn to talk or versify. Whatever language it uses it makes up as it goes and immediately forgets. Every time it opens its mouth it has to start all over again. This is why it remains a baby and dies (praise be to babyhood) a baby. In the art of not living one is not ephemerally permanent but permanently ephemeral.



ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

Because most people are not sufficiently employed in themselves, they run about loose, hungering for employment, and satisfy themselves in various supererogatory occupations. The easiest of these occupations, which have all to do with making things already made, is the making of people: it is called the art of friendship. So one finds oneself surrounded with numbers of artificial selves contesting the authenticity of the original self; which, forced to become a competitive self, ceases to be the original self, is, like all the others, a creation. The person, too, becomes a friend of himself. *He* no longer exists.

—

Words have three historical levels. They may be true words, that is, of an intrinsic sense; they may be logical words, that is, of an applied sense; or they may be poetical words, of a misapplied sense, untrue and illogical in themselves, but of supposed suggestive power. The most the poet can now do is to take every word he uses through each of these levels, giving it the combined depth of all three, forcing it beyond itself to a death of sense where it is at least safe from the perjuries either of society or poetry.

LANGUAGE AND LAZINESS

LANGUAGE is a form of laziness; the word is a compromise between what it is possible to express and what it is not possible to express. That is, expression itself is a form of laziness. The cause of expression is incomplete powers of understanding and communication: unevenly distributed intelligence. Language does not attempt to affect this distribution; it accepts the inequality and makes possible a mathematical intercourse between the degrees of intelligence occurring in an average range. The degrees of intelligence at each extreme are thus naturally neglected: and yet they are obviously the most important.

Prose is the mathematics of expression. The word is a numerical convenience in which the known and the unknown are brought together to act as the meeting-place of the one who knows and the one who does not know. The prose word accomplishes no redistribution of intelligence; it merely declares the inequality, and so even as expression it has no reality, it is an empty cipher.

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

Poetry is an attempt to make language do more than express; to make it work; to redistribute intelligence by means of the word. If it succeeds in this the problem of communication disappears. It does not treat this problem as a matter of mathematical distribution of intelligence between an abstract known and unknown represented in a concrete knower and not-knower. The distribution must take place, if at all, within the intelligence itself. Prose evades this problem by making slovenly equations which always seem successful because, being inexact, they conceal inexactness. Poetry always faces, and generally meets with, failure. But even if it fails, it is at least at the heart of the difficulty, which it treats not as a difficulty of minds but of mind.



THIS PHILOSOPHY

This philosophy, this merchant-mindedness: how much have we here? what sum? And of what profit? Somewhere, in the factories of reality, all this has been produced which now floods the market of wisdom, awaiting its price-ticket. What is science? yard-measure and scale to philosophy, expert-accountant, bank clerk. What is poetry? miserable, ill-fed, underpaid, ununionized labourer, pleased to oblige, grateful for work, flattering himself that poverty makes him an aristocrat.



Only what is comic is perfect: it is outside of reality, which is a self-defeating, serious striving to be outside of reality, to be perfect. Reality cannot escape from reality because it is made of belief, and capable only of belief. Perfection is what is unbelievable, the joke.

W H A T I S A P O E M ?

IN the old romanticism the poem was an uncommon effect of common experience on the poet. All interest in the poem centred in this mysterious capacity of the poet for overfeeling, for being overaffected. In Poe the old romanticism ended and the new romanticism began. That is, the interest was broadened to include the reader: the end of the poem was pushed ahead a stage, from the poet to the reader. The uncommon effect of experience on the poet became merely incidental to the uncommon effect which he might have on the reader. Mystery was replaced by science; inspiration by psychology. In the first the poet flattered himself and was flattered by others because he had singular reactions to experience; in the second the object of flattery makes himself expert in the art of flattery.

What is a poem? A poem is nothing. By persistence the poem can be made something; but then it is something, not a poem. Why is it nothing? Because it cannot be looked at, heard, touched or

WHAT IS A POEM?

read (what can be read is prose). It is not an effect (common or uncommon) of experience; it is the result of an ability to create a vacuum in experience – it is a vacuum and therefore nothing. It cannot be looked at, heard, touched or read because it is a vacuum. Since it is a vacuum it is nothing for which the poet can flatter himself or receive flattery. Since it is a vacuum it cannot be reproduced in an audience. A vacuum is unalterably and untransferably a vacuum – the only thing that can happen to it is destruction. If it were possible to reproduce it in an audience the result would be the destruction of the audience.

The confusion between the poem as effect and the poem as vacuum is easily explained. It is obvious that all is either effect or it is nothing. What the old romanticism meant by an uncommon effect was a something that was not an effect, an over-and-above of experience. Although it was really not an effect, it was classified as an effect because it was impossible to imagine something that was not an effect. It did not occur to anyone to imagine nothing, the vacuum ; or, if it did, only with abhorrence. The new romanticism remedied this inaccuracy by classifying the poem as the cause of an effect – as both cause and effect. But as both cause and effect the poem counts itself out of experience: proves itself to be nothing masquerading as some-

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

thing. As something it is all that the detractors of poetry say it is; it is false experience. As nothing — well, as nothing it is everything in an existence where everything, being effect of effect and without cause, is nothing.

Whenever this vacuum, the poem, occurs, there is agitation on all sides to destroy it, to convert it into something. The conversion of nothing into something is the task of criticism. Literature is the storehouse of these rescued somethings. In discussing literature one has to use, unfortunately, the same language that ■■■ in discussing experience. But even so, literature is preferable to experience, since it is for the most part the closest one ■■■ get to nothing.



The only productive design is designed waste. Designed creation results in nothing but the destruction of the designer: it is impossible to add to what is; all is and is made. Energy that attempts to make in the ■■■ of making a numerical increase in the sum of made things is spitefully returned to itself unused. It is a would-be-happy-ness ending in unanticipated and disordered unhappiness. Energy that is aware of the impossibility of positive construction devotes itself to ■■■ ordered using-up and waste of itself; to ■■■ anticipated unhappiness which, because it has design, foreknow-

A COMPLICATED PROBLEM

ledge, is the nearest approach to happiness. Undesigned unhappiness and designed happiness both — anarchism. *Anarchism is not enough.*

A COMPLICATED PROBLEM

A COMPLICATED problem is only further complicated by being simplified. A state of confusion is never made comprehensible by being given a plot. Appearances do not deceive if there are enough of them. The truth is always laid out in an infinite number of circles tending to become, but never becoming, concentric - except occasionally in poetry.

A L L L I T E R A T U R E

ALL literature is written by the old to teach the young how to express themselves so that they in turn may write literature to teach the old how to express themselves. All literature is written by mentally precocious adolescents and by mentally precocious senescents. How not to write literature, how not to be precocious: cultivate inattention, do not learn how to express yourself, make no distinction between thoughts and emotions, since precocity comes of making one vie with the other, mistrust whatever seems superior and be partial to whatever seems inferior — whatever is not literature. And then, if you must write yourself, write *writing-matter*, not *reading-matter*. People will think you brilliant only if you tell them what they know. To avoid being thought brilliant, avoid knowing what they know. Write to discover to yourself what you know. People will think you brilliant if you seem to be enjoying yourself, since they are not enjoying themselves. To avoid being thought brilliant, avoid pretending to be enjoying yourself. Make it clear that you know that they know that nothing is really

ALL LITERATURE

enjoyable except pretending to be enjoying yourself.



People may treat themselves ■ extraneous phenomena or as fundamental phenomena — it does not matter which. It does not matter, so long ■ they behave consistently as one or the other. What discredits character is not self-importance or self-unimportance, but the adjustment of personal importance according to expediency.

MR. DOODLE-DOODLE- DOO

MR. DOODLE-DOODLE-DOO, the great mathematician and lexicographer, then put aside his work and said: '*adultery* and *adulteration* can wait until I return.'

For Mr. Doodle-Doodle-Do was at one thing or the other by turns, and this particular morning he felt his mathematical genius complaining: it was undoubtedly true that it was a long time since he had been out to get Numbers. So, leaving *adultery* and *adulteration* to take care of themselves, he walked out into the Square, and from the Square into the Gardens; and in the Gardens he sat down on a bench near the rockery and began to think with the mathematical half of his brain.

'Let me see. I left off with *honey* last time. Now the problem will be ■ show that *honey* ■ a purely mathematical symbol is equivalent to *honey* as ■ philological integer. If I can do this I have once more proved that $2 \times 2 = 4$ is the equivalent of "two times two is four." For it's not enough to show a thing is true: you must also show that true

MR. DOODLE-DOODLE-DOO

is true. By being a mathematical lexicographer and a lexicographical mathematician, I am therefore able to check the truth with the truth. My last words are — “that’s true” but “that’s correct,” which explains how I can be a philosopher and a gentleman at the same time.’

With this Mr. Doodle-Doodle-Doo crowed three times: once for lexicography (Doodle), once for mathematics (Doodle), and once for himself (Doo), wherein the truth was checked by itself and found correct. The immediate matter in hand, however, was honey. So he left off crowing and proceeded with his calculations, which went so quickly that it is very difficult to record them. But they were something like this: —

$$\begin{array}{ll} \text{H O N E Y} & = \text{HONE} + \text{Y} \\ \text{G O N E} + \text{Y} & = \text{GONEY} \text{ (sailors' term} \\ & \text{for albatross)} \\ \text{L O N E} + \text{Y} & = \text{LONE(L)Y} \\ \text{B O N E} + \text{Y} & = \text{BONEY} \\ \text{O N E} + \text{Y} + \text{M} & = \text{MONEY} \end{array}$$

BONEY	GONEY	HONEY	LONE(L)Y	MONEY
1	2	3	4	5
H	O	N	E	Y
1	2	3	4	5

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

At this point he stopped following him. But that his researches must have reached some happy conclusion was obvious from the enthusiasm with which he later returned to his lexicography. His calculations then were something like this: -

1 2 3 4 5

H O N E Y

1 2 3 4 5

A D U L T [E R Y

1 2 3 4 5

H O N E Y

1 2 3 4 5

A D U L T [E R A T I O N

∴ H O N E Y E R Y ∴ H O N E Y E R A T I O N

1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5

But H O N E Y = S W E E T

5 4 3 2 1 5 4 3 2 1

∴ S W E E T E R Y ∴ S W E E T E R A T I O N

Which went far enough to persuade him that in lexicography he was, if anything, even more skilled than in mathematics.

A N I M P O R T A N T D I S T I N C T I O N

The important (but infrequently drawn) distinction between what is gentlemanly and what is dull in poetry. Most people read poetry because it makes them feel upper-class, and most poetry is written by people who feel upper-class; at least by people who take pleasure in describing themselves as upper-class; for instance, by men who make themselves feel upper-class by holding gentlemanly feelings toward woman, and by women who make themselves feel upper-class by acknowledging these feelings. This poetry is idealistic poetry: it dramatizes ■ non-existent emotional life and ■ real because it is not real. It also ■ 'interesting' because it is not real.

Practical poetry is written by people who do not feel upper-class: who do not feel anything. It describes themselves, but not ■ upper-class, not, in fact, as anything. It is real and therefore not dramatic and therefore seems unreal. It therefore seems (and is) dull. The only reason that people ever read dull poetry (such as some of Shakespeare's) is

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

that they mistake it for gentlemanly poetry (such as all of Browning's). For few people are really interested in anyone else's description of himself except as it makes them feel upper-class. They mistake it for gentlemanly poetry because of their inability to distinguish between the interestingness of dull poetry and the dullness of 'interesting' poetry.

T H E C O R P U S

THE first condition was chaos. The logical consequence of chaos was order. In so far as it derived from chaos ■ ■■ non-conscious, but in ■ far as it was order, it had an increasing tendency to become conscious. It therefore may be said to have had a mind of which it was unconscious and of which it remained unconscious in its various evolutionary forms until the mind developed to ■ point where it in turn separated from order and invented the self. The occasion of the self was a stage in the most anarchic evolutionary form, man, coeval with the general transformation of chaos into ■ universe. A consciousness of consciousness arose and at the same time divided between order, in which mind was the spirit of cohesion, and the individual, in whom mind was the spirit of separation. In the ensuing opposition between these two, order yielded to the individual by allowing him to call it a universe, but triumphed over him since, by naming it, the individual made the universe his society and therefore his religion. Order was the

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

natural enemy of the individual mind. To conciliate it order appealed to the individual mind for sanction. This sanction, the original social contract, was not between man and man, but between ■■■■■ and the universe as men, or society. Although the sanction ■■■■■ given on the basis of natural instinct, or the non-conscious identity of man and the universe, society has always claimed authority over conscious thought and purpose. In incorporating the ■■■■■ it attempts to incorporate the mind and in turn to give the mind its sanction through the sanction which it first had from the man: it constitutes itself the parent past and the mind present memory of it.

The social corpus is tyrannically founded on the principle of origin. It admits nothing new: all is revision, memory, confirmation. The individual ■■■■■ must submit itself to the generalized ■■■■■ of history, it must become part of its growing encyclopædia of authorities. Such ■■■■■ generalized cosmos, however, must have been formulated more by the desire of people to define themselves ■■■■■ group than to account for the origin of their personal existence. Origin, indeed, is properly the pre-occupation of the individual and not ■■■■■ communal interest. The group is only interested in the formal publishing of individuals for the purpose of establishing their social solidarity. Art, for example,

THE CORPUS

is record not creation. The question of origin is only emphasized in ■ far ■ it proves the individual a member of the group, as having a common pedigree with the other members of the group. Thus God, the branding-iron of the group idea, does not appear in societies where as yet there is imperfect differentiation between the individual and the type; where ■ yet there is no need for branding. Once the distinction between the group mind and the individual mind could be made the group mind really ceased to exist. The distinction, however, could only be made by minds complete in themselves, and ■ such minds have always been extremely rare, the fiction of a group mind has been maintained to impose the will of the weak-minded upon the strong-minded, the myth of common origin being used as the charter of the majority. The tyranny by which this majority ■ enforce its will may be either democratic ■ oligarchic. The only difference is that in the first case, provided that the democracy is a true democracy (which it very rarely is), the group mind is so efficient that it acts despotically as one man; in the second case the group mind is less efficient and, by a process of blind selection, the most characteristic of the weak-minded become the perverse instruments of unity.

Both the individual mind and the group mind ■ engaged in ■ pursuit which may be described ■

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

mind-making or, simply, truth. The object of group truth is group-confirmation and perpetuation; while individual truth has no object other than discovering itself and involves neither proofs nor priests. In order, however, to win any acceptance it must translate itself into group truth, it must accommodate itself to the fact-curriculum of the group. But not only is such truth forced to submit to group terminology and order, but the group conscience demands that the individual mind serve it by working with the purposes of the group. The group, indeed, tries to preclude all idiosyncratic thought-activity and to ■■■ what intelligence it can control against it. This civic intelligence is found simplified in the catechism instructing children 'to order themselves lowly and reverently before their betters and to do their duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call them.'

The confirmation of the candidate as a member of the group establishes the superiority of group opinion over individual opinion and the authority of the group to define this relationship ■ one governed by civic duties. It is the nature of these duties which determines the categories into which civic intelligence falls. The group ■■■■■ be anything ■■■■■ than a superstition, but the categories assemble all available material into ■ textual Corpus. There being no real functional group sur-

THE CORPUS

viving, this Corpus of group texts is used as the rallying point of the group, the counterpart of the primitive clan totem, the outward and visible sign of a long-extinct grace.

The Corpus, in making categorical demands upon the individual, thus limits the ways in which works may be conceived and presented. These demands become the only 'inspiration' countenanced, and theoretically all creative supply has its source in them. This seems a fairly plausible view of the status of the arts and sciences in human society. The occurrence of ■ supply independent of Corpus demands, its possibility or presence, is a question that the social limitations of our critical language prevent us from raising with any degree of humane intelligibility.

■■■

We live on the circumference of a hollow circle. We draw the circumference, like spiders, out of ourselves: it is all criticism of criticism.

P O E T R Y A N D M U S I C

THERE is ■ weakling music and a weakling poetry which flatter each other by making critical comparisons with each other: there is ■ literary criticism of music in which words like 'wit' and 'rhetoric' excuse musical flabbiness, and a musical criticism of poetry in which words like 'symphonic' and 'overtone' excuse poetic flabbiness. This mutual tenderness leads to false creative as well as false critical analogies between poetry and music; to the deliberate effort to use the creative method of one art in the other.

I am not distressed by the poeticization of music because I do not much ■■■ what happens to music; it is a nervous and ostentatious performance, and little damage remains to be done to it. I am, on the other hand, distressed by the musicification of poetry because poetry is perhaps the only human pursuit left still capable of developing anti-socially. Musicified or pictorialized it is the propagandist tribal expression of a society without any real tribal sense. We get ■ 'pure' poetry, metaphysically

P O E T R Y A N D M U S I C

musical, that reveals a desire in the poet for a civilized tribal sense and for poetry as an art intellectually coördinating group sympathies: and we get a sort of jazz poetry, politically musical, that reveals a desire in the poet for a primitive tribal sense and for poetry as an art emotionally coördinating group sympathies.

Art indeed is a term referring to the social source and to the social utility of creative acts. Poetry I consider to be an art only when the poet consciously attempts to capture social prestige: when it is an art of public flattery. In this sense Beaumont and Fletcher were greater artists than Shakespeare — better musicians. Shakespeare alternated between musical surrenders to social prestige and magnificent fits of poetic remorse.

To explain more precisely what I mean by this distinction between what I believe to be poetry and what I believe to be art I shall set down a number of contrasts between poetry and music.

1. All real musicians are physically misshapen as a result of platform cozening of their audience. They need never have stood upon a platform: there is a kind of ingratiating 'come, come, dear puss' in the musical brain that distorts the face and puckers up the limbs. All real poets are physically upright and even beautiful from indifference to community hearings.

ANARCHISM IS NOT ENOUGH

2. The end of a poem is the poem. The poem is the only admissible test of the poem; the reader gets poetry, not flattery. The end of a musical work is an ear, criticism, that is, flattery.

3. A musical work has a composer; it is an invention with professionally available material and properties. A poem is made out of nothing by a nobody — made out of a socially non-existent element in language. If this element were socially existent in language it would be isolated, professionalized, handed over to a trained craft. Rhyme and rhythm are not professional properties; they are fundamentally idiosyncratic, unavailable, unsystematizable; any formalization of them is an attempted imitation of music by poets jealous of the public success of music.

4. Music is an instrument for arousing emotions; it varies only according to the emotions it is intended to arouse and according to the precision with which these emotions are anticipated in the invention of the music. Emotions represent persons; not persons in particular but persons in general. Music is directed toward the greatest number of persons musically conceivable. It is a mass-marshalling of the senses by means of sound. Poetry is not an instrument and is not written with the intention of arousing emotions — unless it is of a hybrid musico-poetical breed. The end of poetry is not to create

POETRY AND MUSIC

a physical condition which shall give pleasure to the mind. It appeals to an energy in which no distinction exists between physical and mental conditions. It does not massage, soothe, excite or entertain this energy in any way. It is this energy in a form of extraordinary strength and intactness. Poetry is therefore not concentrated on an audience but on itself and only produces satisfaction in the sense that wherever this energy exists in a sufficient degree of strength and intactness it will be encouraged by poetry in further concentration on itself. Poetry appeals only to poetry and begets nothing but poetry. Music appeals to the intellectual disorganization and weakness of people in numbers and begets, by flattering this weakness (which is sentimentality), gratifying after-effects of destructive sociality. The end of poetry is not an after-effect, not a pleasurable memory of itself, but an immediate, constant and even unpleasant insistence on itself; indeed, it has no end. It isolates energies in themselves rather than socially dissolving one in another.

5. Music provides the hearer with an ideal experience, a prepared episode. Poetry is not idealistic; it is not experience in this episode or programme sense. There is an entertaining short-story variety in music; a repellent, austere monotony in poetry. Poetry brings all possible experience to the

Laura Riding

Anarchism Is Not Enough is a manifesto against systematic thinking, a difficult book by a famously difficult writer. For the scope of its critical imagination, it is the most radical work of Laura Riding's early period. Published in 1928, when Riding was twenty-seven, *Anarchism* is a kind of early *auto/biographic literature*. Long out of print and now available for the first time in paperback, this is one of the most imaginative and daring works of literary theory ever written by a modernist figure.

'The originality of *Anarchism*'s thought seems hardly less arresting today than it was when first published 70 years ago. We owe Samuels a great debt for restoring this book to our attention.'

Jerome McGann, author of *Dante, Gabriele Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost*

Anarchism Is Not Enough is Laura Riding's most exuberant work. Written when she was in her late 20s, this work touches on all the themes that would preoccupy the poet for the rest of her life. Lisa Samuels' introduction is an ideal companion to this work by one of the most original and surprising of the American modernist poets.¹

Charles Bernstein, author of *My Way: Speeches and Poems*

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley 94720 www.ucpress.net